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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis that the presence of males inhibits the emergence of women as leaders and that this phenomenon is unrelated to differences in dominance, but rather to sex role expectations, was tested. Thirty women attending a woman's college were paired with both male and female peers, whom they did not know, for an experimental task in which one member of each pair was to assume a leadership role. The experiment consisted of 30 trials in which suspects of a simulated theft were interviewed by paired subjects, one of whom was the interrogator and the other the assistant. The leadership role was operationally defined as that of interrogator in the interview situations. The California Psychological Inventory (CPI) was administered to all subjects prior to the experiment to provide a measure of dominance. Only one third of the women assumed leadership when paired with men. This finding appears to be due to the influence of sex role norms since there was a significant increase in leadership behavior when the same women were observed in same-sex pairs. In contrast, male cohorts when paired with other men showed no significant change in leadership behavior. Analysis of CPI dominance scores indicated that dominance was not a prerequisite for male assumption of leadership. (SW)

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Sex Role Expectations and the Assumption of Leadership by College Women

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Sex Role Expectations and the Assumption of Leadership by College Women

With few exceptions the leaders in our society are men. Women rarely hold prominent positions in politics, business, labor, law, medicine, or the church. It has been suggested that men are instinctively sought out for leadership and that women are not given, or do not take the opportunity to exercise their leadership skills unless men are absent (Deaux, 1976; Jacobson & Effertz, 1974; Tavris & Offir, 1977). This study tests the hypothesis that the presence of males inhibits the emergence of women as leaders and that this phenomenon is unrelated to differences in dominance, but rather to sex role expectations.

Method

A group of 30 women attending a women's college was paired with both male and female peers (co-eds), whom they did not know, for an experimental task in which one member of each pair was to assume a leadership role. The experiment consisted of 30 trials in which suspects of a simulated theft were interviewed by paired subjects, one of whom was the interrogator and the other the assistant. The ostensible purpose of the experiment was to measure the skill of the subjects in detecting which suspects were guilty. The real purpose of the experiment was to observe whether the women were inhibited in their assumption of the leadership role when paired with men. Each subject worked first in a cross-sex and then in a same-sex pair. The leadership role was operationally defined as that of interrogator in the interview situations. The alternative role was that of the assistant, who functioned as recorder. The California Psychological Inventory was administered to all subjects prior to the experiment to provide a measure of dominance.

Results

The presence of male peers clearly inhibited the assumption of the leadership role by women in this study. When the experimental group of women was paired with males only ten of the 30 females were leaders ($\chi^2 = 6.67$, df = 1, $p<.01$). When paired with other females, 18 subjects became leaders. As shown in Table 1, this change in leadership behavior across the two interview situations was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.06$, df = 1, $p<.05$, one tailed McNemar test for significance of changes). In contrast, male cohorts of the experimental group when paired with other men showed no significant change in leadership behavior: 20 were leaders when paired with women and 19 when paired with other men.

Insert Table 1 about here

Did more men assume leadership because they were, as a group, more dominant? Comparison of mean CPI Dominance scores (See Table 2) showed that the mean scores of both groups of female subjects (the experimental group and their female cohorts) were somewhat higher than those of the men, although not significantly so. Similarly, the male leaders paired with both the experimental females and the co-eds failed to show higher mean dominance scores than their assistants. Thus dominance was clearly not a prerequisite for male assumption of leadership.

When women did assume leadership did they need to be more dominant? The ten experimental female subjects who became cross-sex leaders had a high mean dominance score of 60.70, but this was not significantly different from their male assistants' mean score of 54.00. Also, the cross-sex co-ed leaders' mean dominance score was neither high nor different from that of their assistants.

Insert Table 2 about here

As a more qualitative measure of leadership behavior, the decision-making process involved in role assignment was examined. Analyses of the taped conversations at the beginning of each trial enabled the clear identification of 27 decision makers in the 30 cross-sex trials of the experimental group. The remaining three role assignments were settled by the male suggestion of a coin toss. No significant sex difference in decision-making was found. Females made the decisions in 12 of 27 cross-sex trials and males in 15. Also, there was no significant change in the experimental group's decision-making behavior when the cross-sex and same-sex interviews were compared. As shown in Table 3, comparisons in which all of the cross-sex data were pooled revealed that both the women and men were significantly more likely to assign the role of interrogator to the male member of the pair. Assignment of males to the role of interrogator was made by 71 percent of the 24 female decision-makers and 68 percent of the male decision-makers ($\chi^2 = 8.05$, df = 1, $p < .01$).

Insert Table 3 about here

Conclusion

The results of this research are consistent with everyday observations that males are more likely to be found in leadership roles. Only one third of the women in this study assumed leadership when paired with men. This finding appears to be due to the influence of sex role norms since there was a significant increase in leadership behavior when the same women were observed in same-sex pairs.

The decision-making data and the CPI scores clarify, to some extent, how this happens. It does not appear to be true that men have more dominant personalities and appropriate leadership by winning an overt, competitive struggle with women. Rather, a more subtle process prevails, with

both males and females usually deciding, in accordance with societal, sex-role prescriptions, that the male should assume the leadership position.

In an earlier study, Megargee (1969) paired high dominance women with low dominance men and found that the women made the decision as to leadership 69 percent of the time and 91 percent of the time appointed a man as leader. Megargee's research, and this study, suggest that sex role attitudes rather than competence or dominance determine leadership behavior in cross-sex pairs. Apparently women, as well as men, think that women should not be leaders.

On an optimistic note: In contrast to Megargee's study where only 20 percent of high dominance women assumed leadership roles, the random sample of women in this study became leaders 33 percent of the time when paired with male peers. Perhaps leadership behavior by women in cross-sex pairs is changing; unfortunately, it is not happening precipitously!

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Table 1

Assumption of Leadership

in Same- and Cross-Sex Trials

Women[a]

Same-Sex Trials

Cross-Sex Trials	Assistant	Leader
Leader	4	6
Assistant	8	12

$\chi^2 = 3.06$, $p < .05$, one-tailed test[c]

Men[b]

Same-Sex Trials

Cross-Sex Trials	Assistant	Leader
Leader	7	13
Assistant	4	6

$\chi^2 = 0$, n.s.

[a]The 30 female subjects comprising the experimental group.

[b]The 30 male cohorts of the experimental group.

[c]The McNemar Test for the significance of changes was used here. Alternatively, using the binominal test, $Z = 1.75$, $p = .04$.

Table 2

CPI Mean Dominance Scale Scores

	Experimental Females[a]	Male Cohorts	Co-ed Females	Co-ed Male Cohorts
Overall Average	55.97 (30)	52.80 (30)	52.90 (30)	50.73 (30)
Cross-sex Leader	60.70 (10)	52.20 (20)	50.60 (10)	50.35 (20)
Cross-sex Assistant	53.60 (20)	54.00 (10)	54.05 (20)	51.50 (10)
Same-sex Leader	57.83 (18)	52.11 (19)	55.50 (12)	53.45 (11)
Same-sex Assistant	53.17 (12)	54.00 (11)	51.17 (18)	49.16 (19)

[a]Number of subjects in each group is shown in parentheses.

Table 3

Male and Female Decision Making and Role Assignment on Cross-Sex Trials[a]

	Male	Female
Number of Subjects Making Leadership Decisions	31 (56%)	24 (44%)
Number of Subjects Appointing Males as Leaders	21 (68%)	17 (71%)
Number of Subjects Appointing Females as Leaders	10 (32%)	7 (29%)

[a]Pooled data for all male and female subjects.